



# CHILD PROTECTION INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

## **Introduction**

This leaflet will help you understand our child safeguarding procedures. It explains how we deal with situations where we think your child might be abused.

You have a right to know why people are concerned about your child and we will involve you at all stages.

One of our social workers will explain in detail the reasons why we are involved with you and your family.

If there is anything in this leaflet that you do not understand please ask your social worker to explain in more detail.

## **What is child abuse?**

Child abuse happens when a child, someone under 18 years, is neglected, harmed or not provided with proper care. Children can be abused by family members, people they know, or by a stranger. It can happen in their home or somewhere else.

Child abuse can be:

- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect

A child may suffer or be at risk of suffering from one or more types of abuse and abuse can happen on a single occasion, or often over a period of time.

## **Why do you investigate?**

We must, by law, investigate all situations where people are concerned about a child's safety and wellbeing, even when the people concerned want to tell us anonymously.

## How do you investigate?

When investigating concerns about a child's wellbeing or safety your social worker will ask you to work with them where possible:

- To find out if your child has been harmed or is at risk of being harmed; **and**
- To make sure your child is protected from further harm or risk

When your social worker visits you they will show you their Northern Health and Social Care Trust identification card. They will

- Explain the reasons for their visit
- Explain what are the concerns
- Listen to what you have to say
- Tell you what has to be done as part of the investigation

Usually your social worker will want to see and speak to your child alone, as well as any other children living in the home.

Your social worker will also need to talk to other people who know of your family: teachers, health visitors, doctors, probation officers, education welfare officers and the police.

The police have a legal responsibility to investigate all cases of alleged child abuse. Anyone who thinks a child is being abused, or is at risk must tell the police, social workers or the NSPCC.

We work closely with the police and will decide at an early stage if your child should be interviewed by a social worker and a specially trained police officer. This will mean your child will only have to go through the information once.

If we think your child needs a medical examination we will ask your permission. If your child is a teenager they may be considered to be able to give their own consent for examination.

## **What happens next?**

We try in the first instance to help families to stay together. So our social workers will expect you to protect your child from further harm or risk. We rarely remove children from their parents during the first part of our investigation.

If we think your child has been harmed (or is at risk of being harmed) by another member of your household, we may ask that person to agree to leave the household, at least until we have completed our investigation. If they refuse, your social worker may feel that your child will be safer in someone else's care. Usually they will only do this if you agree, but in some circumstances your social worker may have to use their legal powers to make sure your child is safe.

If there is no cause for concern that your child has been abused, then we will take no further formal action. We will tell you in writing and your social worker will deal with any issues raised by you as a result of our investigation.

If our investigation shows your child may have been abused we normally hold a child protection case conference within 15 working days.

## **What is a child protection case conference?**

A child protection case conference is where professional people who have responsibility for certain aspects of your child's welfare, meet to discuss their concerns. You will already know some of these people.

## **Who will be there?**

The people invited to attend might include:

- Social workers
- Nursing staff (such as a health visitor, school nurse or hospital nurse)
- Medical staff (such as a GP, hospital doctor or school doctor)
- Teachers
- Police officers
- Education welfare officers

- Probation Officers
- You
- Someone to give you support
- Your children (where appropriate) and
- A member of our staff who will be there to write down what is said

## **What happens at a case conference?**

At a case conference the people there will:

- Share information about the concerns and what has been found so far;
- Share information about your family's current situation;
- Find out whether your child has been abused or if they are at risk of being abused;
- Decide whether we should continue with the investigation and recommend what action to take (if any);
- Decide whether or not to place your child's name on the child protection register (we will explain what the child protection register is on page 7);
- Make sure there is a child protection plan in place for all children whose names are placed on the register (we will explain child protection plan on page 8);
- Make sure that we give you appropriate help with the case conference.

The case conference must make its decisions based on the safety and well being of your child.

## **What are my rights?**

In any child protection investigation we will always consider both you and your child's Human Rights.

We encourage you to seek legal advice or speak with one of the voluntary organisations able to advise you, particularly if you are concerned about your rights. Your social worker will be able to tell you how to contact the appropriate voluntary organisation.

## **What can I say in the case conference?**

We will ask your views at all stages of our investigation. Our policy is to invite you and people who support you, to all, or part of the case conference to tell us your views and what you think should happen.

We will send you a letter to tell you the time, date, and place of the conference, and the names of the other people we have invited.

We will give you a copy of your social worker's report, at least one day before the case conference. Your social worker will discuss with you what is in the report and you are allowed to keep this report.

If you have any difficulties getting to the case conference (for example you do not have any transport or anyone to look after your child) please tell your social worker who will be able to help. They will also be able to help with arranging someone to support you, if you do not know of anyone.

If you need an interpreter the social worker will also make these arrangements. The social worker is there to help you with what you want to say and to make sure that everyone at the case conference understands you. If for any reason you cannot come to the conference, you can give your comments to the case conference in writing or in another form.

Coming to such a large meeting can be daunting. It might help, before you come, to write down what you want to say. This could be useful as a reminder to you when you are in the case conference. If you prefer, you can give it to the chairperson who will meet with you before the case conference starts. The chairperson will read it out for you during the case conference. At this meeting the chairperson will explain what will happen at the case conference and will tell you who will be present.

We will not invite you and the person supporting you to come at all, or to part of the case conference if the chairperson feels this would affect how the case conference considers your child's

interests. If this is the case the chairperson will explain the reasons to you in writing before the conference. In these circumstances you will be asked to provide written information for the case conference to consider.

### **What can my child say in the case conference?**

If your child is old enough to express their feelings and views, we will listen to them very carefully and your social worker will put them to the case conference.

Sometimes it will be important for your child to come to all, or to part of, the case conference. It may not always be helpful for your child to be there. If we invite your child to the case conference, your social worker will tell them what to expect.

### **What is the child protection register?**

The case conference may decide to place your child's name on the child protection register. This is a register of children who need protection. We will place your child's name on the register if:

- They are being abused or at risk of abuse **and**
- They need a child protection plan to keep them safe.

The register will keep some details about your child and how they have been abused or are at risk of abuse. Your child's name will stay on the register until a review case conference decides this is no longer necessary

After the Initial Case Conference the next case conference will be within 3 months.

The register is confidential and can only be seen by professional people who have a genuine reason to see it.

If the case conference decides to place your child's name on the register they will also recommend a child protection plan.

## **What is a child protection plan?**

A child protection plan describes what the different professionals and you will be expected to do to make sure your child is protected from harm in the future. We will give you a copy of the written plan. Your social worker will also explain the plan to you.

The child protection plan will tell you what the case conference has recommended and what you have to do. It will tell you:

- What the plan is for;
- Who will visit you and your family and what they will do;
- Who can help you; and
- Who will monitor and review the plan and how and when they will do this.

## **How will you tell me what the conference decides?**

The case conference will tell you what it decides or, if you are not at the conference, your social worker will visit you. The chairperson will also send you a copy of what the case conference discussed within 14 days.

If you disagree with the decision to put your child's name on the register, you should tell your social worker. Your social worker will talk to you about your concerns and will make arrangements for you to meet with their line manager and the chairperson of the conference within 7 days.

## **Finally**

If your social worker is concerned about your child, they will tell you and explain what you need to do.

They will work closely with you and your family and you need to be involved as much as possible in planning what will help you and your family.

When investigating situations of possible child abuse, we follow the Area Child Protection Committee's Regional Policy and Procedures.

These procedures make sure that children and their safety come first and that we carry out our investigations fairly and thoroughly.

If you want to see a copy of the child protection procedures, ask your social worker to arrange it. You will also be able to see a copy of the procedures at your local library or on the Trust website at [www.northerntrust.hscni.net](http://www.northerntrust.hscni.net)